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HOME

NEWS

GALLERY

LOCATION

AMENITIES

CONTACT



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THE LOLLYGAGGER'S GUIDE TO THE WILMINGTON RIVERWALK



Family Time on the Horizon

Winding along the Cape Fear River and dipping into [Historic Downtown Wilmington](#), and now, stretching nearly two miles—from bridge to bridge—Wilmington’s extended Riverwalk offers an intimate look at life in the Port City. From sunrise to sunset, from merchant ships to tugboats to runners, bikers, and local fisherman, what happens in Wilmington truly happens along the banks of the Riverwalk.

Let’s start downriver and work our way uptown, to the extended pathways and the expanding riverfront.

At the southernmost tip of the Riverwalk, the splendor of [Governor’s Landing](#) homes by the river frames a postcard-worthy lookout onto the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge. As sailboats lean port, then starboard, catching the wind just right, a father and young son spend some quiet time watching the water. A large cargo ship appears on the horizon, readying for that grand entrance beneath the bridge into downtown waters; the son’s eyes widen and his father smiles, then takes his hand.

A few steps farther down the Riverwalk, patio seating and canvas umbrellas invite eating, drinking, and lingering for the view. The [Pilot House](#) offers cozy, quieter, potentially romantic ambiance, while Elijah’s is a casual, something-for-everyone haven. Just off the Riverwalk, at S. Water and Ann, [Chandler’s Wharf](#) features boutiques and curio shops, as well as [Nema Eatery and Lounge](#), one of Wilmington’s more innovative menus, including vegan entrees.

Around the corner, it's the [Cape Fear Serpentarium](#), famed exotic animal headquarters, and the macabre, fun-loving Museum of the Bizarre—not at all culinary suggestions, but decent detours for sampling Wilmington's quirkier side.



Sea Garden Art

Back on the [Riverwalk](#), you'll likely notice inviting white rocking chairs lined up outside River to Sea Gallery, home to wind socks, paintings, and brightly colored sea creatures. Perfect for river—and people—watching, these rockers provide a relaxing vantage point.

Up next, [Le Catalan](#), a French bistro on the water. With a lively, European ambiance, front-row seating faces outward, toward the Riverwalk—every seat is a seat with a view.



River to Sea Rockers

[Wilmington Water Tours](#) offers a myriad of river cruises, including eco tours up the Northeast Cape Fear, maritime tours south of the bridge, and sunset sails featuring live music on board. Former riverkeeper and perennial river buff Doug Springer both narrates and entertains, leaving time for the quiet contemplation that comes from being on the water.



JW Brooks Walkway

Looking for some fresh air and a little brackish sunshine? For a cheap thrill, catch a Beeline Water Taxi from Market Street or Chandler's Wharf for a round-trip shuttle to the Battleship North Carolina, Wilmington's pride and historic joy. On October 2, 1961 the Battleship passed beneath the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge to assume her new post, watching over Historic downtown Wilmington; today, the [USS North Carolina](#) remains one of only 22 ships designated a National Historic Landmark. Touring the Battleship is like walking into another world, and riding the Water Taxi is the way to get there.

Feel free to catch the Water Taxi *just because*, as well— nothing like a little boat ride to clear the head, and fill the senses.

Summer afternoons, beach boats venture off the waterway and come upriver for a lazy afternoon at the [George](#), a favorite docking spot for lunch or afternoon cocktails.

Just past the [George](#) bob a couple more options for getting on the river. The [John Knox](#) offers one-hour narrated river tours from its home base, beside the [Henrietta](#), Wilmington's resident riverboat. Summer means dinner cruises, including the [Cape Fear Blues Festival](#) 'Blues Cruise,' and warm afternoons mean ice cream and beverages on [The Barge](#), Miss Henrietta's stationary sundry station.



Dancing Down the Riverwalk

On your right, it's Old Wilmington's City Market, established 1880, an indoor shopping alley featuring books, art, clothes, and assorted trinkets; you'll also notice blue and orange rockers, perfect for catching some sun while the family searches for buried retail treasure.

Detour through town, just past the [Henrietta](#), around the scenic façade of the JW Brooks Wholesale Grocers. Join others in taking pictures against the deep red brick wall, with the Battleship looming in the background and the clipping along in the afternoon winds.

Or you can dance your way around the building, like the young couple shuffling to hip-hop beats and giggling down the Riverwalk.

The cobblestone street spills onto Quince Aly, one of Wilmington's many hidden alleys turned 'alys'—so secret, they spell themselves in code. Along Market and Water Street, meet for [ghost tours](#), [haunted pub crawls](#), and [Historic Downtown carriage rides](#). With learned guides and relevant costumes, walking tours show you the 'back alys' of the Port City.

And now, detour through town a bit, passing [Kabob Restaurant](#) with its Middle Eastern fare, [Riverboat Landing's](#) balcony dining, [Caprice Sofa Bar](#), [Circa 1922](#), and assorted historic watering holes between Market, Princess and Front Streets. Then pick up the Riverwalk near the [USCGC Diligence](#), whenever our Coast Guard's in port.



Aboard the Cape Hatteras

The best things in life are free, including a tour of the USCGC Diligence. You can 'spy' on the Battleship through high-powered binoculars, tour the navigation room, and learn about Diligence patrols on open waters. (Depending on the day, you may even see the new barbeque grill in action.)

Beyond the USCGC Diligence and then, the [Hilton \(home of Ruth's Chris Steakhouse\)](#), the Riverwalk morphs into a real walking trail—less and less commerce, more and more nature. Transition out of Historic Downtown and make your way to Wilmington's City Docks, passing Cape Fear Community College's *Cape Hatteras*, of the [Marine Technology](#) program, and the college's [Boat Building program](#). When the boat building studios are occupied, open workshops reveal student craftsmen building their own way onto the water, as the smell of sawdust wafts onto the Riverwalk. Periodically, the program hosts a boat show, featuring live boat building demos, tours of the Cape Hatteras, and finished products on display.



From One Boat to Another

A row of the best benches on the Riverwalk waits around the corner, facing back toward downtown and the steps you've just taken. Shoes off, guitar across lap, textbook pages blowing in the breeze...many a Riverwalker has enjoyed this view.

Keep walking, and keep an eye out for [fisherman](#) scattered along Wilmington's City Docks, near the [Wilmington Visitor's Bureau](#), across the overhead walkway from the [Coastline Inn](#).

Up and around the [Wilmington Convention Center](#), soft reeds blow in the wind, their golden stalks catching the late-afternoon sun, a sort of bucolic beauty seen only along during this stretch of Riverwalk.

And then, your first glimpse of [Port City Marina](#)—boats bobbing in spacious slips; the artfully designed bandshell decorating the new [Pier 33](#). Continue along a sleek stretch of Riverwalk, where stools, benches, and modern sculpture enhance your Riverwalking experience.



Azalea Festival Belles Beneath the Bandshell

Wander around the marina and onto Pier 33, home to this summer's "[Rock the Dock](#)" concerts and town's most talked-about new event space. The graceful lines of the overhead bandshell are best viewed by standing beneath: "That's obscenely gorgeous," said one first-time viewer.

The Riverwalk extends past the upcoming [Blackfinn Ameripub](#) and [Vida Mexican Kitchen y Cantina](#) alongside [City Park](#) and the north end of town, coming to a natural close the base of Isabel Holmes Bridge.

Having discovered nearly two miles of life by the river, those last serene footsteps are something to savor. When you're ready to reverse the memories, step by step, turn toward the setting sun and Riverwalk back to town.



Riverwalker at Sunset



Map of Wilmington Riverwalk

- 59
-
-
- 2
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This entry was posted in Event Pier, News, Restaurants in Wilmington NC, Things to do in Wilmington NC and tagged Cape Fear River, Historic Downtown, Port City Marina, Riverwalk, wilmington nc on April 13, 2016 by Jamie Lynn Miller.

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- July 2015
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- May 2015
- April 2015
- March 2015
- February 2015
- November 2014
- August 2014
- July 2014
- June 2014
- May 2014
- April 2014
- March 2014
- January 2014
- December 2013
- November 2013
- October 2013
- September 2013
- August 2013
- July 2013
- June 2013
- May 2013
- April 2013
- March 2013
- February 2013
- January 2013
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- October 2012
- September 2012
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